

**TOWN OF WEST HARTFORD PUBLIC HEARING
MARCH 22, 2016**

**2016-2017 FISCAL YEAR TOWN BUDGET AS PROPOSED BY THE TOWN
MANAGER AND THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS:**

President Slifka: Okay. We're now gonna call the 6:45 Public Hearing to order. This is on the 2016-2017 Fiscal Year Budget as proposed by the Town Manager and Superintendent of Schools. Can you we begin with a roll call, please, Ms. Labrot?
Councilors Barnes, Cantor, Casperson. Davidoff, Hall, Kerrigan, Slifka, Wenograd, and Williams.

President Slifka: Thank you, Ms. Labrot. We'll go right to the sign-up sheet, and although I have your names and addresses here, if we could ask you to state your name and address for the record when you get to the podium, and we'll begin with Mary Fleischli. Could you help her out?

Ms. Fleischli: Good evening. Okay. Can you hear me? Okay. Good evening. My name is Mary Fleischli and I live at 28 Brunswick Avenue. First, I wanna commend you all on all the hard work you put in for our Town and your work on the budget, containing costs while retaining the quality schools, safety and services that we love in this Town. I appreciate that you kept the property tax increase under two percent. You clearly all care about our Town and residents. However, I would like you to scrutinize the MDC. West Hartford, as you know, will need to pay 8.7 million in sewer taxes to the MDC this year. This is a 6 percent increase from last year and a big part of our budget. The MDC is increasing taxes to towns and increasing fees to residents while simultaneously creating a separate discounted rate for water and sewer for Niagara Water Bottling Company. They have no provisions for Niagara to reduce their usage in the event of a drought. The MDC took these actions without consulting the public. The rates were voted on during a two-minute meeting of the Committee on MDC Government that was poorly publicized and no one from the public attended. It is also my understanding that they did not notify any of you. The Committee members in attendance voted unanimously for the new rates. These actions indicate that the MDC is not interested in public or governmental input. Their actions give the impression that they do not feel allegiance or accountability toward the public. Water is a public resource. It needs to be safeguarded by people who are thinking about the long-term future of a water supply and feel accountability to the public. I ask you to do whatever is in your power to address the MDC's lack of accountability. In particular, please demand that the MDC Commissioners communicate with you about any discussions they have with Niagara or any other large water users. Please demand they do not do any more secret deals. The public should be able to give input before the MDC makes decisions that affect our rates and the future of our water supply. It is my understanding that the member Town Councils appoint 17 of the 29 member Board of MDC Commissioners. If the current Commissioners don't represent the interests of the towns, I encourage you to appoint different Commissioners. The MDC Commissioners need to be feel beholden to the public and not corporate interests. Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you, Mary. Next speaker is Dave Pauluk.

Mr. Pauluk: Hey, I'm Dave Pauluk, 416 Oakwood Avenue. Now you may know me as a member of the Board of Education, but I'm here tonight to speak as, speaking as a private citizen. But I did bring my budget book just in case you got a question, lemme know. I wanted to speak to you about the MDC's tax levy and its impact on the Town and the budget. I want you come back with me. Come back in time. Let's go back all the way to October 2015. You'll remember what happened. The DEEP came to Town. They started clear-cutting trees and there were complaints made, voices raised. Ron, I know you sent a few letters or two and they stopped. They said, okay, we're gonna, we're gonna take it easy. They came back and they started cutting down more trees, trees that we thought that they weren't going to take. This was a government agency coming into our Town, devastating a neighborhood. I know many of you were interviewed. You had comments for it. We can't forget that. What happened there caught us all by surprise. We didn't know it was going to happen. And we had meetings and finally things were worked out. And we, we all learned from that and we said, "We're never gonna let this happen again." Unfortunately, something like that is happening now and it's led to the tax increase that we're seeing today. When I first read about the Niagara plant in Bloomfield, I thought it was a Bloomfield issue. I said, well, they're having their Trout Brook moment. It's not just Bloomfield's issue. It's all of our issues. Every town that's served by the MDC is affected by this deal. It happened in secret. The Bloomfield Town Council held a meeting where it wasn't well-publicized as well as the previous speaker said. And the MDC cut a special deal for a discount that only Niagara could receive. Now how does that affect us here in West Hartford? Well, it means that we're all paying more, that we in fact as consumers received a rate increase while Niagara is getting a rate decrease if they come to town and start bottling water. Since you're seeing, I did some math. I had to use a spreadsheet for it, but it turns out the amount they pay at current rates for, to fill 100 bottles of water, they pay five cents, a nickel for the hundred bottles for the water that would fill them. But those bottles would sell in Lowe's for \$15.58. That's quite a profit. Now, of course, some of that goes to Lowe's, some goes to Niagara. How much do they make? We don't know 'because they won't tell us. They say that's proprietary information. So we do have, as was mentioned, we have three representatives from West Hartford who are on the MDC Board. I encourage you to call them in, have them explain their votes. Did they ask questions? Have they ever voted no? You know, and why didn't they communicate that? Mayor Slifka, you're the liaison. They should've let you know what was going on and that should've been communicated but it appears it wasn't. We deserve better, and I encourage you to ask our representatives to better represent West Hartford. Thank you.

President Slifka: Dave, before you go, we, though we know you and we think the people of the Town know you 'because they voted for you, we do need you to state your address.

Mr. Pauluk: Ah, thank you, 416 Oakwood.

President Slifka: Thank you. Okay. Next up, someone else who needs no introduction, George Kennedy. What I got on eBay for mine from last year is amazing. I sold mine from last year on eBay from you and it...

Mr. Kennedy: Did you get any money?

President Slifka: Yes, I did.

Mr. Kennedy: That's...I want part of it. Anyway, my name is George Kennedy. I live in 19 Waterside Lane and I'm President of the West Hartford Taxpayer Association. As an initial comment, the remarks on the MDC, we completely concur with. Something has to be done there, I think. The other thing is I would like to commend the Mayor. Good luck and just as we get you trained, you go and leave us. [Laughter] This is ridiculous.

To start with, I hafta commend the Town Council and the, particularly the West Hartford side of the budget in bringing the total Town Budget less than two percent. It's been a long time in coming and we hope this is only the beginning of even better and leaner budgets in the future. Having said that, I still have to take exception to the Board of Education portion of the budget, which is as usual, adds significant increases. We are well aware that educational expenditures and the Board of Education budget has always been a sacred town or sacred cow in this town and in most other towns but there's a physical reality to be factored in. People, taxpayers should understand, and I know you folks know this, that West Hartford has a student population of 9500 students and a projected 600+ decrease in that student population. Yet the Board of Education has planned to add staff, proposed and also proposed a \$17.2 million capital budget, 12.8 million of which is to add 8 new classrooms to Hall High, even in light of the student decrease. Now, if you run a factory and your demand goes down, you cut your production lines and you cut some of your people. We're suggesting simply we look at this in terms of the fact we have less demand and apparently we'll have so in the future. Why? There are serious budget considerations that need to be asked here and the Town Council, which is elected to represent all of our citizens, need to ask those questions now. Consideration should include: West Hartford already has one of the highest property taxes in the State. State educational funding. West Hartford is the fourth most underfunded town out of 19 in the State that're underfunded. Why and what're we doing about it? We have representatives that should fight a little harder for our money. International education proficiency studies performed and developed by educational specialists have clearly shown that money does not equate to educational excellence. Rather, parental and community support and discipline do. Parents can simply not afford to offload their support and guidance to teachers and continue to demand more educational dollars be spent to achieve educational excellence. In some towns, parents are chasing the budget dollars because this makes up for, they have two jobs, they have two cars. The reality is that parents hafta do their part. Teachers cannot make up for kids who come to school unprepared and underfed. Proof of the pudding. We, the United States, spend more for education per student than any other country, but in international testing we're somewhere between 20 and 26. And in my opinion, having grown up in this town, I go back to 1940—or well actually living here, '50. I remember when these schools were putting people, they were like prep schools. Yes, the demographics across the board have changed but parents hafta get involved. And give that to Essie if you would, please. Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you, Mr. Kennedy. The next speaker is Kim Green.

Ms. Green: Good evening. My name's Kim Green and I live at 28 Northfield in West Hartford. And I, too, wanna thank all of you for helping to make West Hartford the incredibly wonderful town to live in. My family and I have lived here for over 20 years and we plan to continue to live here for as long as we can. I do have great concerns, though, regarding the six percent increase in sewer taxes to the MDC in the amount of \$8.7 million. On November 18, 2015, in a meeting that lasted less than 5 minutes. I, it was pointed out it was actually two minutes, as

evidenced by information we've received through the Freedom of Information Act, the MDC changed their policy to increase residents' water usage rates from 2.53 ccf dollars to \$2.66 per ccf. At the same time, they established a discounted rate for large volume users of over 500,000 gallons a day, even though that had no users at that time that would fit that criteria. We know now that the rate was used to sweeten the deal between Niagara Bottling Company and the MDC. They will be paying \$0.50 less per ccf than residents and customers. The MDC is increasing taxes to towns and increasing their fees to residents while simultaneously creating a separate discounted water and sewer rate to Niagara Water Bottling. This is unacceptable to me. And it's unacceptable to residents and it's gotta be unacceptable to you, too, our Town Council. The MDC states they have infrastructure repairs to make. Well, let Niagara pay for them. They will be making a minimum of a \$0.50 per bottle profit when they take out 1.8 million gallons a day every day forever to bottle 10 million bottles a day every day forever. That alone just in Bloomfield is a \$4 billion proposition. By allowing this tax increase to go unchallenged, you're basically telling the residents of West Hartford that you are not opposed to this special arrangement that the MDC has made with Niagara. And I know you're opposed. We need to hear it. We need to see it. Fortunately, Senator Bye of West Hartford has proposed a bill that passed through the Planning and Development Committee that will take away that discount. The MDC now finds itself having to hire many lobbyists and pay for advertising to try to stop this bill. That costs a lot of money. Guess who's gonna pay for it? Us. We need you now to stand up to the MDC and their consistent pattern of raising our taxes and water rates. Our water is our precious resource. You've had that term so many times in the past few weeks and we can't hear it enough. I, they are supposed to be stewards of our water and by their own definition, they are stewards of our water. They're not to be selling it to, at a discount to these companies. And remember, this is a policy change. It's just not a special rate. It's a policy change that will open up our water for any other company that wants to be, to come in if we don't stop this. So I'm asking on behalf of a lotta people, a lot of people that are watching. They're watching here, they're watching now, they're listening, they're waiting to hear what's going to happen that you please take a stand. Support this bill, help us keep our taxes down, most importantly help us keep that reservoir. Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you, Kim. The next speaker is Sue Farrell. Is Ms. Farrell here? Oh.

Ms. Farrell: Hi, I'm Sue Farrell of 52 Arlington Road. Anyone who knows me, I hate public speaking and I hate meetings. So this is a hot topic to get me off my butt here to talk about Item #4, the budget and the fact that...the largest share of our 3.7 percent increase in total operating expenses is that of the MDC ad valorem tax based on the value of real property. I don't think anyone out there even realizes that's part of this whole water bill. Not only did our water use rates increase and the sewer, special sewage charge increased, now this ad valorem tax is comin' through, it's business as usual. It's been comin' through for years and it keeps comin' through and it keeps going up. In fact, since 2011, the West Hartford portions of the ad valorem tax has gone up 29 percent. Since 2010, our sewer rates have gone up 210 percent and our water rate since 2010 has gone up 21 percent. All right. My bill's \$138. Now that my kids are in college, I'm not getting hit with huge water bills. And this is probably my cheapest water, my cheapest utility out there. But this is disgusting, that we hafta sit here and put up with this. Behind the scenes, MDC doing their own thing without anyone knowing, no knowledge, and it just sweeps on through and the MDC just gives us their old, well, we gotta raise, well, we gotta save you

money, yeah \$10 a year. Their little proposed Niagara deal is gonna save me \$10, okay? I can afford \$10 and I know a lotta people can't afford \$10 but these jobs that they're proposing are minimum wage. They're between 35 and 175. I mean, it depends on which, which day we're talking. And what really bothers me is to see Hartford in the state that they're in with the Yard Goats and everything going' on and how they wanna get out of this mess and do it on their own by doing some cost-sharing arrangements kind of like this. How long have we had this MDC, 1920s have they been there? And look at, and we're just getting raped by them. And you guys just sit here except Beth who stands up and goes and fights for us and speaks for us. And I'm just really sad that you guys just keep telling' us to go away and shut up. It really disappoints me and I really hope you will take a stand and support Beth Bye's bill, SB-422, okay? That's what I hafta say. Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you. Now I saw some other folks walk in after we, we started so and I fear that based on past practice maybe you've now signed up for a different hearing than you intended to, so if there's anybody who came in and signed up to speak to the Budget Hearing, please come up and do that now. If it was for something later in the night, we'll get to ya at that time. So anybody else? Okay. With that then, we will close the Budget Public Hearing, And we will start our next one at 7:15 according to the Public Notice. Thank you.

Public Hearing closed at 7:04 p.m.

Essie S. Labrot
Town/Council Clerk

/dd/jw